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ABSTRACT

Special characteristics of action-oriented approaches to therapy, cautions and tips for using these approaches, and sample activities are provided in this guide. An introductory section explains the relationship of action-based counseling to the traditional action-oriented methods and principles of Adlerian psychology and emphasizes the merit of the approach for couples and families as well as individuals. Brief directions are given for 13 activities that require group problem solving and cooperation between couples or among group members. A list of 11 references for further information is included. (JHZ)

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ADVENTURE-BASED COUNSELING: AN ADLERIAN "NATURAL HIGH"

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Adventure-based Counseling is a therapeutic approach reflective of traditional action-oriented methods (Nikelly & O'Connell, 1971) and principles of Adlerian psychology. The preferred mode of treatment for some individuals or groups is one of action, much as in the Adlerian preference for outsight - behavior change - rather than just insight. Unfortunately, for many, the therapy experience resembles the school experience, information-rich but action-poor. The action-orientation of this approach to helping can take a variety of forms depending on the nature of the goals unique to each individual or group. In this sense, Adventure-based Counseling is more of a guiding concept than a specific set of activities or procedures. The emphasis is on the development of opportunities in natural settings whenever possible for participants to learn - by - doing. Such opportunities can lead to a sense of personal empowerment eminating from a series of realizations that "I can do it." Likewise, couples and groups can achieve similar feelings of empowerment. The "natural high" experienced in Adventure-based Counseling is oftentimes literal as well as figurative, in that activities may take place outdoors in the trees or brooks or gorges. Few feelings of exhilaration can match those which can accompany the mastering of a challenge that tests one's mettle.

Adventure-based Counseling is an approach which emphasizes active encouragement as a methodology to facilitate achievement of the natural high described by O'Connell (1981) as consisting of self esteem and social interest. A review of related research suggests that such an action-oriented approach has merit not only for individuals pursuing these goals but more particularly for couples and families. In fact, these and similar goals seem to be common themes in the growing number of couples enrichment workshops using action-oriented methods (Mason, 1980). Equality, respect, responsibility, encouragement, cooperation and other Adlerian concepts are common threads weaving throughout the literature in marriage and family therapy, Outward Bound programs, Project Adventure programs, and Marriage Encounter groups. Action has something unique to offer the helping professions in facilitating the achievement of these goals. Adler (1978), in describing the need for enhanced cooperation between the sexes, described an old custom in a German community where bethrothed couples were given a two-handed saw with which they were to cut a tree trunk (as a test of their abilities to cooperate).

Adventure-based Counseling is not a haphazard collection of activities. While it is true that with some activities, "the experience speaks for itself," with others additional interventions may be necessary. There is some evidence to suggest that the way in which an activity is introduced to a group can influence the result. For example, the use of metaphors (Bacon, 1984) in describing an upcoming activity may enhance the value of the experience for the individual or group. Below are listed special characteristics of action-oriented approaches to therapy, important cautions and tips in utilizing such approaches, sample activities, and informational resources.

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INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES

MOON BALL: Take a beach ball, throw it into the group and see how many times the group can hit it without anyone hitting it twice in a row. Try for a record: 10, 25, 50, even a 100 times in a row. Set a world's record! PROPS

COUNT OFF: Have the group try to count to 10 (or 15 or however many persons are in the group) out loud so that no one says a number at the same time. When a number is spoken simultaneously, start over.

ACTION ORIENTED THERAPY APPROACHES

* May be adjunctive to an insight approach: i.e. play therapy
* Can be used as an exploratory tool:initial assessment
* Can be designed to be primarily non-verbal: can help get past "smoke screen" of words.
* As assessment, activities can reveal behavior patterns, ways of relating and problem solving techniques
* Can be used as therapy or recreation
* Tend, by definition, to be ACTIVE and involve everyone.
* Can allow for the levels of risk among members which are conducive for trust to develop.
* Allows for focusing on what was done, not why a person chose to do a behavior.
* Typically builds on successes through sequencing of activities
* Provides a number of opportunities where natural consequences are present - good chances to deal with failure
* Comes in a variety of forms: art, dance, puppetry, writing, music, and adventure.

CONSIDERATIONS AND POSSIBILITIES

* Sequencing: building on success!!!!!
* Perceived Risk/Actual Risk = Adventure
* Which of these excercises may be goal related
* How might you use these activities in your program(s)?

COOPERATION EXERCISES

Couples

SIT-DOWN. Pairs grab hands, put feet together and sit down so that buttocks touch the floor at the same time.

ROW-BOAT STRETCH Once the pair is sitting down, hold hands, put feet (stretched out) together and SLOWLY AND GENTLY push and pull each other to get a nice and easy back stretch.

STAND-UP After stretching, have the pair try to stand up together. Remember, buttocks must come off the floor at the same time and feet must stay in contact.

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GOTCHA Have the couple take a 12 foot rope or piece of nylon webbing and place an end around their waists, holding on to the rope with only one hand. With the rope taut, the object is to cause the other person to fall off balance. Feet should remain at shoulder width and not in front of each other. It's also against the rules to wrap the rope around the wrist. Try three falls out of five. **PROPS**

Group or family

TOSS-A-NAME-GAME: Standing in a group of 8-15, pass a tennis ball/bean bag/rubber chicken (etc.) around and have everyone say his or her name clearly and distinctly. Next, pass the ball to the person beside you and call their name (this goes around the circle). Then, call a name across the circle, wait for a visual response and toss the object to the person you called. After the first ball has been going a few times, add a ball; then another, and another, until you have three to five balls going at once.

LINE UP: Have the group line up by birth date, distance from home, colors of pants, number of years of education, etc.

WAMPUM: In a group of 5-12, place one member in the center so that all members are within reach of the rolled up newspaper which the center person is holding. The object of the game is for the center person to hit ("wamp") a circle person before they can call another circle person's name. If the circle person calls a name of someone not present or calls the name of the center person, they become "it." Someone in the circle starts the game by calling another circle person's name. The center person attempts to "wamp" the called person before they can call another name. **PROPS**

Problem-Solving

ALL ABOARD (TEAM ON A T-SHIRT): Using a two foot square or a T-shirt, have the group stand on the object for five seconds without touching the floor or carpet around it. Make the activity challenging but temper with compassion. A two foot square can support up to 15 people! SPOTTING IS CRITICAL! WATCH FOR FALLS. YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE! **PROPS**

TRADIN' PLACES (TP Shuffle): Using a 2'X 6" X 10' board or an equal space taped to the floor, have the group line up along the object so that half the group faces the other half. Ask the group to try and trade places without falling off. If a member falls off, either start over or count the number of mishaps and add a penalty to the total time it took to successfully complete the activity. **PROPS**

PYRAMID: Ask the group to form a symmetrical pyramid. Watch out for possible falls from persons achieving a height of four feet or more! See if they can walk forward in the pyramid.

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LOW ELECTRIC FENCE: Tie a piece of rope between two chairs where the legs meet the seat, both at the from and back of the chair. The object is for the group to pass under the electric fence without touching the fence, chairs, or floor directly under the fence. If anyone touches, the group has to begin again or whomever is touching the "zapped" member must return and start again. PROPS

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